

Bridging the Gap Between Schools and Universities

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Abstract: This paper presents critical reflection of academic staff from different fields and universities, and education practitioner, who have been working closely with schools and district government in the field of school management, in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. It aims at sharing valuable experiences and lesson learned on issues encountered by schools and its member in developing their schools. Applying the principle of reflective journal, this paper shows that working with schools and district government has helped us to broaden our knowledge, both theoretical and practical knowledge, and to improve our practice as teacher educators and facilitator in the field of school management and school development. It also explores how the Whole School Development approach is used in developing schools. It argues that universities and schools need to learn from each other through continuous collaboration and partnership. A strategic plan of capacity building and mentoring program for school development that involve universities will allow knowledge sharing between schools and universities. It is believed that through continuous collaboration and partnership, will bridge the gap between universities and schools, the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of school management and school development.

Keywords: school management, universities, whole school development, Indonesia.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at sharing valuable experiences after working closely with schools and district government in the field of school management. As teacher educators and education practitioner, we have been working together under the project of USAID Prioritas (Prioritizing, Innovation and Opportunities for Reaching Indonesia's Teachers, Administrators and Students), a five year program funded by USAID to improve the quality of basic education access in Indonesia. For three of us, the teacher educators, our role in the project is to facilitate workshops, to mentor schools, and to adapt what we learned from the project in our own context in the university. Working together in the project for almost three years has created a community of learning that allow us to share and learn together about our experiences with schools, as well as our own practice as teacher educators in the university. This article will present our story on working with schools and district government, what we learned, and how those experiences has influenced our practice as teacher educators.

2 THE CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Doing a critical reflection is inspired by the idea of reflective journal that is usually written by students to evaluate their own learning. In our case, we tried to reflect our own experiences both as USAID Prioritas facilitators and teacher educators. This act has allowed us to reflect our own thoughts and feelings and evaluate what we have done and what we could do better to improve our practices as teacher educators.

2.1. *Whole School Development Approach.*

Whole School Development Approach is an approach that sees schools as a community. It is a mechanism to improve learning, facilities, and social environment in schools. It aims to ensure that school is supported by sufficient management and community to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. It is a participative approach that involves all parts of school community. As a

community, we believe that every school members must have an equal right to communicate that promotes learning, and creates harmony, synergy, and a healthy interaction. It is expected that a conducive school environment can be established that every school members feel comfortable in schools.

School principals play a critical role to empower schools community. School leaders need to have the ability to influence school members and community. They must have the ability to identify and manage its resources, to create positive school environment, and to facilitate school members to be creative and innovative. By using WSD approach, team work among stakeholders, school principals, supervisors, school community, and teachers, work together based on their own role and authorities.

2.2. What We Do

As USAID Facilitators, we were trained to conduct workshop for school principals, teachers, supervisors, and school committees. USAID Prioritas has provided Modul on Good Practices in Learning and School Management. After workshops, we also mentor schools on how they follow up and implement the workshop. One of the key points delivered during each workshop was the importance of following up activities to makes sure the workshop is implemented at school. Therefore, mentoring program is essential during the project.

In the mentoring program, we visit schools and meet the school members. It begins with a meeting that involved school principals, teachers, school committees, and school supervisors. In the meeting, facilitators and the school community discuss about following up activities.

In the workshop, facilitators use workshop material that is specially designed by USAID Prioritas. After workshop, each schools required to make a plan for follow up activities. This follow up activities is measured by specific indicators in the aspect of school management and teaching and learning process. Since WSD Approach is used, school principals, school supervisors, teachers, government stakeholders are invited and involve in the workshops. Hence, the team work for each school has been created since at the earlier stage of the program. Facilitators are included in this team work. For facilitator from universities, this becomes opportunities to also learn about knowledge and practices in schools.

2.3. What We Learned

Good Practices at Schools

The module developed by USAID Prioritas named “Praktik yang Baik”, Good Practices. From the module, we learn about practical knowledge, both in teaching and learning, and in the aspect of school management. Coming from theoretical knowledge, the module has allowed us to see what actually schools (can) do to improve the quality of learning and the quality of school management. It is believed that a good quality of learning can be improved through a good school management system.

In the aspect of school management, for example, we learned about what is the practical part of instructional leadership. What does instructional leadership mean for schools? How does instructional leadership apply at the school level? What should the school principal do as an instructional leader? It shows us that as instructional leaders, school principals

Another topic is about the use of school fund, Bantuan Operasional Sekolah (School Operational Fund). This topic has allowed us to understand if that the budget for school operational expenses are planned and allocated carefully, it could optimally use to also support learning, not only school operational cost.

From the Module of Good Practice of Teaching and Learning (Modul Praktik yang Baik Dalam Pembelajaran), we did not learn about how to teach student teachers about active learning and contextual learning, but also about how to apply it in our classroom in the university. The mentoring program has informed us the difficulties faced by teacher in implementing active learning and contextual learning in their classroom. Lack of knowledge and skills, limited teaching and learning facilities, lack of support from school principals, are some of the reasons stated by teachers. They said that sometimes they know the concept, they thought they understand it very well, but when it comes to the application, they are not sure whether they do it right or not. It informs as, the teacher educators, the differences between knowing “what” and knowing “how”. We know something but we do not know how to use it.

Community participation is also one the critical issues we learned when we involved in the project. Being a teacher is not only about being able to teach specific subject in the classroom. Teachers and school principals must have ability to communicate with parents to increase the level of participation of parents, the representation of community, in school programs. It notifies us that, the student teachers need to also learn about communication skills. Being a teacher is also about being able to communicate with students, parents, school principals, and other educational stakeholders.

We also learned about the importance of supervision, and how the results of supervision can be used to design continuous professional development for teachers. Learning about indicators used in Assessment for Teachers Performance, has enriched or knowledge about which aspect we should develop in our teacher education program.

In short, the module and our role as facilitators has enriched our knowledge about what teachers need to know, in which has given us opportunities to reflect at our own practice as teacher educators in universities.

2.4. What does “good practice” mean for us?

One of the characteristics of USAID Prioritas program is its focus on “good practices”, both in the aspect of learning and school management. What does “good practices” mean for us as teacher educators?

Good practices are practices that are found in schools, done by students, teachers, school principals, and school communities. These good practices depict activities in school in the aspect of teaching, learning, school management, and leadership. We can say, these are the real thing happen in school daily life.

These good practices are put in the module and deliver to participants through workshops. The design of workshop itself reflects active learning and contextual learning by allowing the participants to do more, rather than to just listen. The participants are invited to fill in work sheets which allow them to work on issues they learned during the workshops.

As facilitators from universities, we have the opportunities to link between theoretical and practical knowledge. One of the main advantage is, for schools, the understanding of the module content can be faster due to the background knowledge provided by facilitators from universities. For us, people from university, it has facilitated us to learn more about schools gained more information the real work of teachers, the school environment, and the challenges on being a teacher in a particular school context. How do these affect our work as teacher educators?

First, it has shifted our view on the work of teachers. Being a teacher is not only about being able to teach particular subject only. It is also about being able to understand their own needs in doing their works, being able to explore their creativity, to communicate wisely with students, supervisor and school committee, to evaluate their own learning, to adapt to the school environment, and so many things. The question is what can we do as teacher educators to

respond to these challenges? It creates awareness for us of what can we do better.

Second, it has helped to improve our own practice in the classroom. The design of the workshops has taught us on how to be more effective in teaching. The preparation of the worksheet, the use of various media, the use of positive feedback, has somehow affected our instructional design at the classroom level.

Third, it has helped us to improve our teacher education curriculum. When the work of teachers is more than just teaching, the curriculum needs to be developed in order to produce qualified teachers. Issues on school management, supervision, leadership, school budget, are now included in our program, and deliver as an additional agenda in our teacher education curriculum.

Lastly, it has strengthened our partnership with schools. By having this closed partnership, it has allowed us to learn from each other which has enriched our knowledge about being a teacher, a school member, in particular school context.

2.5. What We Feel

“working closely with schools, with teachers and school principles, has enriched my knowledge about what school about is, both from teachers and school principles perspectives” (*Faridah*)

“it gives me opportunities to work with department of education at the district level in developing program on capacity building and capacity sharing” (*Bernard*)

“university needs to learn about practical knowledge at the school level which can help to improve the quality of teacher education program at university” (*Sitti Syamsudduha*)

“schools have many good practices that needs to be shared not only with other schools but also with university. University has an important role to improve the quality of our education, through their academic and mentoring program (*Fadiyah Machmud*)

3 ISSUES ON TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

In the last five years, teacher education program in Indonesia has become one of the main issues. Teachers are considered to have low quality. The national average score of UKG (Assessment of Teacher Competence) for instance is still low. This result is caused by various factor. However, one said

that there is a miss matched between the curriculum of teacher education program and what actually teachers need to learn. Based on our own reflection, learning activities in teacher education program is dominated by concept and theory of teaching. It has not introduced student teachers with the real context of schools. Schools context is only introduced in the practicum, which makes student teachers received little practical knowledge about being a teacher. One even said that, even the theories are not closely related to school context.

Indonesia has been trying to respond to this situation. The government has issued more regulations about teacher certification program and national qualifications framework. According to Bintoro (2014), one of the recommendations is to bring the teacher practicum and the practical knowledge from school to PPG (professional teacher education program). Yet, it is argued that if universities not link closely and actively to schools, the student teachers will have limited opportunities to embrace the value of school context. Therefore, a closed partnership between schools and universities is a must.

According to Hayhoe (2002), a teacher education institute deals with the basic discipline of knowledge in integrated ways, while a university commits to theoretical disciplines of knowledge, which leads to knowledge production and an intellectual discourse of liberal ideas (Hayhoe, 2002, p. 6). She argues that these different values in orientation, if not carefully taken into account, will devalue the practical knowledge that characterises teachers' work and teacher education. Cheng and Chow (2004) argue that, in Asia and beyond, teacher educators who work in comprehensive universities often encounter difficulties with excellence in teacher education. Some of the factors include problems with resources, the different nature of their work (see Labaree, 2000),

Zeichner (2011, p. 89) calls for "hybrid spaces" in teacher education, where academic and practical knowledge, as well as knowledge within the community, "come together in new less hierarchical way". He argues that there is a need to shift from the old paradigm of university based-teacher education, which views academic knowledge as an authoritative source of knowledge about teaching, towards non-hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner, and community expertise.

Apart from issues related to different values held by teacher colleges and universities, Ellis, McNicholl, and Pendry (2012) argue that studies are still very rare regarding how universities conceptualise the work of teacher educators as academic work. By examining

how university members themselves conceptualise the work of university-based teacher educators in England, they found that teacher educators were categorised according to the tension between research productivity and their professional credibility to prepare teachers.

According to Grant (2008), the idea of a teacher's knowledge, skills, and disposition has evolved in response to changing social, economic, and political agendas. Teacher knowledge has been defined from having a good knowledge of pedagogy and content, good knowledge in history, geography, and political science, to higher level thinking in the areas of mathematics and science, including technology (see Grant, 2008, pp. 127-129). McDiarmid and Clevenger-Bright (2008) use the term 'teacher capacity' to explain teacher knowledge. According to them, there are three categories that appear to be the notion of teacher capacities across time: (1) knowledge; (2) craft skills; and (3) dispositions. Moreover, Darling-Hammond, (2007) raises the importance of community studies. Considering that teachers might work in places different from their own communities, community studies will help "illuminate culture, customs, and life experiences of different groups of people" (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 171).

Ball and Forzani (2009) argue that professional education curriculum for teachers must focus on practice, "with an eye what teaching requires and how professional training can make a demonstrable difference to the quality of instructional practice" (p.498). Teaching is about representing ideas in powerful ways, organising a productive learning process for students who begin with different levels and varieties of prior knowledge, assessing how and what the students are learning, and adapting instruction to various learning approaches (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 167). Therefore, the task of professional teacher education is to prepare people for this work of teaching, a work that is not natural and is complex (Ball & Forzani, 2009).

4 CONCLUSIONS

It can be seen here that practical knowledge is essential in teacher education. Being a teacher requires not only various types of knowledge, but also craft skills – the practical knowledge to deal with the complexity of a teacher's work in a particular context. Hence, the challenge for teacher education is how to prepare student teachers who are not only well-informed about the knowledge required, but are also able to do their job.

The unique value orientations that characterise teacher education show that it is not only about the identification of the type of knowledge required by teachers. It is also about how teacher education prepares teachers for being able to do their job in the actual field.

Universities and schools need to learn from each other through continuous collaboration and partnership. A strategic plan of capacity building and mentoring program for school development that involve universities will allow knowledge sharing between schools and universities. It is believed that through continuous collaboration and partnership, will bridge the gap between universities and schools, the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of school management and school development.

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